



Back to School in a new way

August 20, 2020

The new school year is always a time of anticipation and excitement - but going back to school in 2020 is unlike anything we've seen before.

Our teachers, schools, and parents are facing unprecedented challenges as we adapt to a COVID-19 world. Their efforts to make sure our Northern New Mexico students get access to the best education possible under these challenging circumstances, and they deserve all our praise and support.

The Laboratory has been playing a role in helping with these challenges, along with our nonprofit and education partners. Whether it's helping a successful series of STEM education summer camps, contributing to a website of remote learning resources, or supporting the work of bringing internet connectivity to underserved areas, we're keen to get involved where we can.

Back to School Drive

Normally at this time of year, the Laboratory organizes a Back to School drive where employees purchase backpacks and school supplies to be given to children who need them, helping make sure they can start the school year with everything they need to help them succeed. The Community Partnerships Office becomes swamped with up to a thousand backpacks, many with individual notes or little extras besides the binders, notebooks and pens.

Despite the start of school looking very different this year, backpacks and supplies are still in high demand, especially since COVID-19 restrictions will limit sharing. So we shifted our drive online, accepting monetary donations from Lab employees (many of whom are working remotely) and buying the backpacks and supplies (including masks and hand sanitizer) in bulk.

Our aim was for a similar total as previous years, but the drive actually raised more than \$22,000 — enough money to purchase 2,200 backpacks with school supplies for children across Northern New Mexico. That's more than double the amount the drive was aiming for.

Looking forward

At this time, we're all understandably focusing on immediate needs and challenges, whether it's support for small businesses, or issues over childcare (the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department's [New Mexico Kids website](#) has some good resources on that topic). But looking to the future is also important, and we're very glad to be involved in the Governor's STEM Challenge again this year, after the [great success of its inaugural year](#).

The showcase of STEM projects from talented teams across the state takes place in December, and while we may not know how things will look then, I'm sure the event, like the school year, will be a success built on the support of the whole community and the valiant work of students, teachers, parents and schools.

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